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STATE FOR WHA/CAN, CA/PPT/IA/WHTI

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [CPAS](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [WHTI](#) [ASEC](#) [ECON](#) [CA](#)

SUBJECT: VIEW FROM THE BORDER: MAINE-NEW BRUNSWICK CROSSINGS

REF: A. 07 HALIFAX 0012

[1](#)B. 07 OTTAWA 2035

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[1](#)1. SUMMARY: Building on the border reporting in ref (a), conoff and assistant visited the Calais/St. Stephen and Houlton/Woodstock ports of entry on the Maine/New Brunswick border the week of March 31. Meetings with border officials, community representatives and businesspeople confirmed that the locals are expecting and prepared for full WHTI implementation, but that concerns still exist about backups and declining tourism from out-of-town. The infrastructure and challenges at both POEs vary widely, serving as a good reminder that there is no one-size-fits-all solution to securing the land border while facilitating legitimate travel. END SUMMARY.

CALAIS/ST. STEPHEN  
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[1](#)2. Calais/St. Stephen really feels like one town on two sides of the border. The border crossing point is a short two-lane bridge over the St. Croix River. Restaurants, shops, services and homes are located close to the river and people in both towns depend on frequent border crossing as part of their daily routine. The port would work fine if it only handled local traffic, but its location on the most direct route to Saint John, NB and Nova Scotia makes it popular with truckers and bus tours, and it is the busiest port on the Maine-New Brunswick border. A backup of even three trucks can quickly become a traffic snarl in the town center, causing gridlock, pollution and a noisy eyesore that keeps border concerns at the top of the local agenda. Officials on both sides have come up with solutions to keep the traffic flowing, but there is only so much that can be done at that location and relief really won't come until the new bridge and POE currently under construction are completed a few miles up the river.

[1](#)3. Questions about the new bridge were raised in most conversations conoff had with residents in St. Stephen and Calais. Construction is well underway, and the general expectation is that the bridge will be completed by October 2008 and the Canadian POE could be operational by December 2008. Current estimates are that the U.S. Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) facility will not be ready until December 2009, with the earliest possibility being late summer 2009. Unfortunately, that delay may mean that a major bridge and direct highway approach from Saint John, NB, may be standing unused for up to a year while traffic continues to crawl in Calais/St. Stephen. The possibility of a partial opening is being floated around, but it doesn't seem to have developed into a concrete plan. Understandably, the local communities are interested in options that will get that bridge open as soon as possible. On the

other hand, CBP employees properly pointed out their concern that rushing to open the new facility or a partial opening may result in substandard work that they may be stuck with indefinitely. As one officer commented, "We've been waiting for that bridge for 25 years, let's take a few more months and get it right."

¶4. Residents on both sides of the river seem to have accepted the WHTI documentation requirements, and now are just trying to determine their best option to facilitate frequent cross-border travel. The new passport card is proving to be a popular choice for Americans, and U.S. Post Offices throughout Maine have been promoting the card, even holding special Saturday hours to accept applications. People do not seem to be choosing the NEXUS card here in great numbers yet, probably because there are currently only two places to enroll in Atlantic Canada, the Halifax International Airport and at the Woodstock POE. Combined, the two centers have enrolled about 800 people since commencing operations. The Canadians in St. Stephen who don't already have passports seem to be waiting and hopeful that New Brunswick will be introducing a WHTI compliant Enhanced Drivers License (EDL). There didn't seem to be any expectations that the state of Maine will be developing an EDL.

¶5. As expected, conversations with two hoteliers in St. Stephen revealed apprehension about the upcoming tourist season. Both reported a decline in visitors in 2007 and they expected numbers to remain down this year. Although WHTI's requirements were cited as factors, both acknowledged that the price of gas and the weak U.S. dollar were probably the biggest contributors keeping U.S. tourists from visiting New Brunswick these days.

HOULTON/WOODSTOCK  
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¶6. The Houlton, ME/Woodstock, NB POEs stand in sharp contrast to their busy little neighbors two hours to the southeast. The CBP and CBSA facilities are right on I-95 and the Trans-Canada Highway, and are designed to handle significant traffic. The CBP

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facility has six processing booths, though no more than four are needed, even during peak travel hours. Backups here are uncommon and traffic tends to flow smoothly in both directions. Unlike the towns of Calais, ME and St. Stephen, NB, which are separated by the width of the St. Croix river, Houlton, ME and Woodstock, NB are 15 miles apart. Thus, the POEs are several miles from residential and business centers as well, so backups don't tend to bring the towns to a standstill.

¶7. There is a NEXUS registration site in the Woodstock CBSA facility and staff members report a steady flow of new registrations - both Canadian and American citizens. Despite the increased awareness of NEXUS in these communities, Port Directors on both sides report that there still aren't enough NEXUS card-carrying travelers to justify a NEXUS-only lane. With the exception of a handful of Canadian nurses who live in Woodstock and commute daily to Houlton, NEXUS cards are still pretty much a novelty at the Maine/New Brunswick POEs.

¶8. CBP Houlton is the central monitoring facility for a number of unmanned POEs along the northern Maine/New Brunswick border. These high-tech border points have video monitors and finger scanners and can be used by pre-registered and vetted members of the community. CBP is deservedly proud of these stations and they are a good example of how novel approaches can be used to meet WHTI requirements. Without these remote stations, people living in these isolated communities might have to travel hours out of their way to cross the border legally at a fully-manned POE.

¶9. COMMENT: The WHTI transition at the Maine/New Brunswick border is going smoothly. Because of significant advance notice and flexible implementation, the end of oral declarations on January 31 went just like any other day at the border. Questions about when the new Calais/St. Stephen POEs will be

operational are probably a bigger story in this part of the district than the upcoming passport requirements. We can expect that any problems or delays with the opening of that bridge will be closely followed and widely reported on both sides of the border. END COMMENT.  
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